

The New Competitive Advantage: a Company Food Philosophy



Forward-thinking companies are realizing the powerful role that nutrition plays in making them more effective. Numerous studies have shown that the right nutrition program reduces employee stress, improves mental clarity, and provides consistent energy. This leads to more productive employees who are also safer on the job. This provides a key advantage needed for success in today's competitive world. In addition, employees who eat right are likely healthier overall, which helps minimize company medical costs. Productive, happy employees and lower medical costs are what every company should strive for.

Imagine Your Ideal Work Force

Imagine a work force where factory workers are more productive and accidents decrease. Workers have better mental clarity, so they make better decisions, and they have more energy, so they are more productive. Now, imagine your sales force struggling to sell when they have brain fog from the wrong diet. Picture how your customer service team members are perceived when they are low in energy or are grumpy because of stress and low blood sugar. And think of how much better you, as a manager, will plan and problem solve when stress is at a minimum and your mental clarity is at its peak. We can go on and on, because smart nutrition can positively affect every single department in your company.

Nourishing is Different from Eating

Now that you know what is possible, how do you get started? First, realize that nourishing is different from eating and hydrating is different from merely drinking. We want people to eat foods that sustain them and nourish them. We know that certain foods increase stress, create mental fog and put people on an energy roller coaster. When this happens, people make bad decisions that negatively affect company productivity or put themselves in harm's way and adversely affect their company's safety record and medical costs. The right nourishment program does just the reverse. This should be your goal.

A Company Food Philosophy Provides the Framework

You begin this transformation by creating a company Food Philosophy and work procedures that support that philosophy. Your Food Philosophy should explain what smart food choices will do for both your employees and the company, and convey that you are committed to fully supporting a transition to this new way of life. Remember that your employees' personal goals are often different from the company goals—you should list some of the company goals, such as better customer service or a safer work place, but be sure to lead with benefits specific to your employees, because employees are the ones who need to change their habits in order to make this new culture sustainable. Benefits they will personally experience include being more stress free, having more energy to do their jobs, being safer on the job and being more pain free.

How Do You Implement Your Plan?

Create your Food Philosophy

- Put your philosophy in writing
- Publicize and display it prominently within your company

Company Benefits of a Comprehensive Food Philosophy

- **Greater Employee Productivity**
- **Fewer Accidents**
- **More Positive Interactions with Customers and Other Employees**
- **Greater Job Satisfaction/Less Turnover**
- **Lower Insurance Costs**

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Determine where food and drink touches your company

- Food served at meetings
- Company cafeteria (if applicable)
- Vending machines
- Homemade lunches
- Lunches bought outside your company
- Celebration treats
- Treat bowls on desks
- Company dinners, picnics and parties

Establish guidelines that affect all of these food areas

- Compile lists of foods that are acceptable at meetings
- Create specifications for healthier vending machine foods
- Provide suggestions for lunches from home and restaurants
- Update menus in company cafeteria (if applicable)
- Provide lists of acceptable celebration foods and treat bowl foods

Educate your employees on why you have established your Food Philosophy and how it benefits them, not just the company

- This education is not a one-time activity—it will take multiple interactions.
- Make it fun and all about how your employees will benefit.
- Provide reinforcement for desired behaviors.

Once you have shown employees how they will benefit, give them the tools to start making sustainable changes

- Help them create their own personal nutrition plan
- Provide recipes for quick, easy, nutritious breakfasts
- Provide recipes for quick, easy, nutritious lunch items they can bring to work

- Provide guidelines on what to choose when they leave the office for lunch
- Give them suggestions on what snack foods to choose
- Teach them which foods will help them to reduce stress, improve mental clarity and improve energy levels
- Teach them how to boost their metabolism

Management MUST lead by example. If you, as a manager, don't believe it and practice it, how can you ask this of your employees?

It Takes Time

Remember that this is all about taking baby steps. Rome wasn't built in a day, and you won't change your company food environment in a week. Keep explaining the food philosophy and the personal benefits for your employees and nudge them forward. If you can find a likable champion within their ranks to actively support this, it will make this much easier. This Food Philosophy needs to evolve until it is a part of the company culture.

Conclusion

Implementing a Food Philosophy to improve your employees' health and your company's competitive position is a critical step that all companies should take in today's work world. While it takes some initial effort, once your employees start feeling more stress free, pain free and mentally sharper, with more energy at the end of the work day, they will embrace the nutrition plan. The small expense needed to implement this program will be greatly repaid in improved performance, lower turnover, improved safety and over time, lower insurance costs. The time to start is now.